

What Is Mind Control?

<https://www.decision-making-confidence.com/mind-control.html>

Terminology

Mind control is also known as manipulation, thought reform, brainwashing, mental control, coercive persuasion, coercive control, malignant use of group dynamics, and many others. The fact that there are so many names indicates a lack of agreement which allows for confusion and distortion (especially by those using it covertly for their own benefit!!)

Let's agree that **mind control comes under the umbrella of persuasion and influence** – how to change people's beliefs and behaviors.

Some will argue that everything is manipulation. However, in saying this, important distinctions are lost. It's much **more useful to think of influence as a continuum**. At one end we have ethical and respectful influences which respect the individual and his or her rights. At the other end we have destructive influences which strip the person of their identity, independence and ability to think critically or logically.

It is at this end that we find destructive [cults](#) and [sects](#). These groups use deception and mind control [tactics](#) to take advantage of the weaknesses, as well as the strengths, of the members, to satisfy the needs and desires of the cult leaders themselves.

A **one-on-one cult** is an intimate relationship where one person abuses their power to manipulate and exploit the other, e.g., teacher/student, therapist/client, pastor/worshiper, wife/husband. This cultic relationship is a version of the larger groups, and may be even more destructive because all the time and attention is directed towards only one person.

So What Is Mind Control?

It's best to think of it as **a system of influences that significantly disrupts an individual** at their very core, **at the level of their identity**(their values, beliefs, preferences, decisions, behaviors, relationships etc.) creating a new pseudo-identity or pseudopersonality. It can of course be used in beneficial ways, for example with addicts, but here we are talking about situations that are inherently bad or unethical.

The psychologist Philip Zimbardo says that mind control is a "**process by which individual or collective freedom of choice and action is compromised by agents or agencies that modify or distort perception, motivation, affect, cognition and/or behavioral outcomes**" and he suggests that everyone is susceptible to such manipulation.

It is not some ancient mystery known to a select few, **it is a combination of words and group pressures**, packaged in such a way that it allows a manipulator to create dependency in his or her followers, making their decisions for them while allowing them to think that they are independent and free to decide. **The person being mind controlled is not aware of the influence process, nor of the changes occurring within themselves.**

Important Distinctions!

There are some important points that need to be made very clear.

First of all, it is a **subtle and insidious process**. Subtle, meaning that **the individual is not aware of the extent of the influence** being imposed upon them. In this way they make small changes over time, believing that they are making decisions for themselves, when, in fact, **all the decisions are being made for them**. Insidious because it's intended to entrap and do harm.

And it is a process, in that **it does not happen in an instant**. It takes time, although the length of time will depend on such factors as the [methods](#) used, the skill of the manipulator, the duration of exposure to the [techniques](#) and other social and personal factors. Nowadays manipulators are sufficiently skilled that it can occur in only a few hours.

There is force involved. **There may or may not be physical force**, but there definitely is psychological and social force and pressure.

Mind Control vs Brainwashing

Steve Hassan makes an interesting distinction between mental control and brainwashing. He says that in brainwashing [the victim knows that the aggressor is an enemy](#). For example, prisoners of war know that the person doing the brainwashing and/or torture is an enemy and often they understand that remaining alive depends on changing their belief system. They are coerced, often with physical force, into doing things they would not normally do. However, when the victim escapes from the influence of the enemy, the effects of the brainwashing frequently disappear. Mind control is more subtle and sophisticated because **the person doing the manipulations is often considered a friend** or a teacher, so the victim is not actually trying to defend themselves. In fact, **he or she may be a 'willing' participant**, and, believing that the [manipulator has their best interests in mind](#), they often **providing private information willingly, which is then used against them** to continue the mind control.

This makes mind control as dangerous, if not more so, than physical coercion. In other words, it can be even more effective than torture, physical abuse, drugs etc. That's worth repeating. In mind control, there may be no physical coercion or violence, but **it can actually be much more effective** in controlling a person.

That's because coercion can change behavior, but coercive persuasion (mind control) will change beliefs, attitudes, thinking processes and behavior (basically a [personality change](#)). And the 'victim' happily and actively participates in the changes, believing it is best for them!

So later on, to accept that someone they trusted and liked has deceived and manipulated them is very difficult, and is one of the reasons that [it is not easy for people to recognize mind control](#). Even when the victim is free of the influence of the [manipulative personality](#), **the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors persist**, in large part because the victim believes they have made these decisions themselves (the effects of decisions we make ourselves are stronger and more long lasting than decisions we know we have been pushed to make), and in part because the person does not want to admit that they have been manipulated without their knowing, they don't want to believe that they have been [tricked by a 'friend'](#).

You can read more about how all the changes are brought about using mind control in these articles on [narcissistic boyfriends](#) and [narcissistic husbands](#).

A Gun To The Head

Manipulators are fond of saying that no-one is holding a gun to the manipulated person's head, and this is powerful in two ways. To the outsider **who does not understand mind control**, it is difficult to argue with.

For the manipulated person, they know that this is true. No-one has actually held a gun to their head, so it reinforces the idea that they have decided for themselves. And decisions we have made ourselves are much more powerful and the effects last longer, so it further propels the manipulated person deeper into the reality created by the mind control.

Who Uses It?

Who would use these techniques, destroying the lives of others for their own selfish benefits? Or manipulating others simply because they can or because they want the control? The answer is psychopaths, or [sociopaths](#), and narcissists. Probably the vast majority of extreme [manipulative men](#) and women who use mind control fit the [profile of a psychopath](#) or a [narcissist](#). And the reason they can do it is because they have [no conscience!](#)

Because people don't know what exactly a psychopath or a narcissist is, the [manipulator](#) is often called something else, an [abusive wife](#) or a [controlling wife](#) or [controlling husband](#), a jealous boyfriend, a [verbally abusive man](#) or a very strict boss. Closer examination often reveals these people to have a personality disorder.

[Check out the signs of an abusive boyfriend here.](#)

Susceptibility

Every person is [susceptible](#). **That includes you!**

It is a myth that only weak and vulnerable people are susceptible, or that there is something wrong with them. In fact, the belief that **"it would never happen to me"** **makes a person particularly susceptible** to mind control [tools](#), because they're not on the lookout for them!

The best way to protect yourself from being [recruited by a cult](#) (it is a myth that people join cults, they are actually recruited) and being subjected to mind control is to understand how a cult functions as well as the [cult tactics](#) that are used to attract and keep members.

Am I in a cult? [Take this quick quiz](#)
Family member or friend in a cult? [Read more](#)

For example, Robert Cialdini has described [six principles of influence](#) that he describes as weapons of influence. It seems that these function in all societies in the world, and they are actually useful in terms of allowing society to remain stable and prosper. He talks about [reciprocity](#), [commitment and consistency](#), [social proof](#), [likability](#), [authority and scarcity](#). He

calls them weapons of influence because they work outside of the awareness of most people and for this reason cults take advantage of them to manipulate and influence their members.

Read about [things manipulative people say...](#)

Cult Experts

[Cult psychology](#) has been studied by various cult experts and while many have their own descriptions and models of how these groups function, there are many similarities.

Robert Lifton, who originally coined the term 'thought reform' after studying American prisoners of war in China, describes his eight principles that are present in a thought reform program, such as in destructive cults.

Steven Hassan, an ex-member of a destructive cult has his own four-point system which he describes in depth in his book [Combating Cult Mind Control](#). He explains how [dangerous cults](#) use mental control tactics to change the identity of the members by controlling the Behaviors, Emotions, and Thoughts of its members and how it further increases its influence by also restricting access to Information (his BITE model).

Margaret Singer in her book [Cults In Our Midst](#) describes her six-point system, where

- the person is unaware that there is a system controlling them,
- their time and environment is controlled,
- they're made fearful and dependent,
- previous behaviors and attitudes are repressed,
- new behaviors and attitudes are installed and
- they are presented with a doctrine which actually has a closed logic.

Read more about [how to escape a cult](#).

Factors Affecting Effectiveness

The destructive effects of mind control are proportional to:

- the techniques used
- the number of techniques
- whether there is [hypnosis](#) and/or [hypnotic mind control](#) used,
- how often the person is exposed to it and for how long
- how close they are to the cult leader, how much direct contact there is
- the skill of the manipulator
- how much exposure to the outside world is allowed
- presence of [sexual abuse](#)
- whether the member continues to have support from family and friends.

For example, a person who has lived and worked in a cult environment for 5 years where the members live together, who rarely leaves the group compound and who has frequent, direct contact with the cult leader will have suffered much more from the effects of [cult control](#) than someone who attends a 2 hour class given by the cult leader once a week for 2 months.

In one-on-one cults, in an intimate [relationship with a sociopath](#), for example, a husband and wife situation, where **all the attention is given to one victim**, the results can be very disturbing. [Complex trauma](#) is the term being used nowadays to describe what happens to children who are brought up by psychopathic or narcissistic parents.

Read about the [signs of mental abuse](#), [dating and violence](#), [preventing dating violence](#), [healing from emotional abuse](#) and [therapy abuse](#).

So what has this got to do with decision-making?

Cult members and those [living with 'controlling' people](#) typically believe that they have made their own decisions and are continuing to do so – even when to outsiders their beliefs and their logic seem very strange and almost unreal! But **their volition, their free-will, has been severely limited**. Cult members have been led to believe all sorts of things, that they are part of an elite group, that they have special or important information that can change or save the world, their leader is flawless, their families are bad/evil/holding them back, that they will be unable to survive outside the group, amongst other things.

If you have a family member or a [friend in a cult](#), you will recognize some of these things! Remember that mind control (sometimes referred to as [coercive control](#)) is a process and that **cult members have reached where they are one step at a time**. Their **reality has been shifted** because of their membership of the group, and within this reality they believe they are making their own decisions, even though these decisions are often designed to keep them trapped in the group.

Even when they are presented with [contradictions](#), unreasonableness and incongruencies in what they say and do, they will often argue to maintain their belief systems intact, for the very reason that they believe that they have chosen and have made their own decisions about it. And indeed, in their new, imposed reality, very often **there are no contradictions or incongruencies** for them! (Remember their critical thinking abilities have been repressed).

People also develop beliefs to help them deal with their mind control situation. These beliefs can actually hamper [recovery](#) later on, as explained in this article about [abusive mothers](#). And an abusive childhood can have [all sorts of effects on adult relationships](#).

[I'm in an abusive relationship. How did that happen?](#)

A Growing Problem

With the state of the world as it is today, it seems that more and more people are turning to fundamentalist ideas to try to find order or safety or security in today's chaos. This means that they are more susceptible to being recruited by [cults](#) because cults offer simple solutions to life's difficult problems.

Cults tend to thrive in difficult times, whether the group is based on religion, politics, finance (making money), fitness, e.g. [yoga cults](#), health or personal development.

It also seems that there are more and more cult films being made today, and that doesn't mean films with a cult following. There are more and more [movies](#) about mind control, destructive cults and psychopaths, if you know what you're looking for!

Here are some mind control [videos](#) with explanations of some of the techniques used, and [fictional books](#) demonstrating the effects.

Read more about [destructive cults](#) and [destructive sects](#) to learn about the effects of coercive control, as well as how to [protect yourself](#) and [undo the damage](#) and [recover from psychopathic relationships](#).